

14 August 1958

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Comments on George Kennan's memorandum on
Poland

1. I am sorry to have delayed so long in furnishing you with comments on George Kennan's memo; I have hawked it around the office a bit to see what some others thought. By and large we all thought it excellent, as you did. We share Kennan's cautious optimism about the long-range prospects of the Polish economy. We have heard other reports of the extraordinary freedom with which the Poles talk, as distinguished from their constraint in writing. We share Kennan's views of the relation of the western boundaries to the Polish political question. And we agree that it would be foolish to believe that Poland is on the road to real self-emancipation from the Soviet orientation, and even more foolish to talk much of "liberation", or to use tactics which might upset the exceedingly delicate balance of forces operating in and on Poland.

2. Just because the balance in Poland is so delicate, however, almost any assertion about that country, especially any

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optimistic assertion, calls forth doubts and fears. Here are two paragraphs that John Huiwenga (fresh back from Oxford) wrote after he had contemplated our general agreement with Kennan:

"It is probably too early to entertain an optimistic view (his II (2)) of the prospects of the Polish economy. It is true that the peasants have made substantial gains since collectivization was terminated. But the increase in agricultural output and food supplies in the free market has been accompanied by sharp price increases. The wage-price squeeze has evidently tightened for salaried workers, and this is one source of the increased labor indiscipline, alcoholism, black-marketeering, etc. More broadly, it remains to be proved that a socialist economy can be half-free and half-planned. It is possible that the attempt to operate in this way will only accentuate imbalances and ultimately lead to an attempt to reimpose sweeping controls. This in turn would be likely to have important political consequences. I do not say that the outlook is for economic crisis, but only that we ought to reserve judgment.

"Kennan's memo leaves me with the feeling that he sees in the Polish political situation a greater degree of stability than

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is justified. The retreat from the liberties won in October 1956 -- both for individual Poles and for Poland vis-a-vis the USSR -- has continued. This must alienate many who have thus far accepted Gomulka's leadership as the least painful alternative. The church-state conflict has been reopened. The Bloc's anti-revisionist campaign must surely have had the Polish party and regime as a main target. While I do not think the Soviets had it in mind to provoke a showdown crisis, it is likely that they intend to conduct guerrilla political warfare against the Poles until an acceptable degree of conformity to Soviet ideology and practice is restored. The point is that important causes of instability continue to be present, and we must continue to regard the Polish scene as subject to unexpected and even violent developments."

And when I read Huisenga's views, I can't help but agree with them. Thus our opinion of the state of affairs in Poland is balanced on the same sort of knife-edge that Poland itself is.

3. We are, I hasten to say, engaged in the production of NIE 12-6-58: The Outlook in Poland, which is scheduled for IAC consideration on 9 September. By that time, if not before, we

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shall have made our views as definite as we can, and commit them to paper.

4. One interesting aside -- the Middle East crisis appears, in Polish minds, to have taken the heat off Warsaw. At the time of the Nagy execution, the Poles were highly nervous and some officials anticipated some new and fairly extreme Soviet move against Polish non-conformity. But these fears now seem to have abated. Ambassador Beam thinks -- as do we -- that the danger of a big Soviet-Polish crisis has passed, at least for the time being.

5. A final speculation. Kennan's last experience in the Communist world was in the last and worst days of Stalin. Is it possible that he found Poland a little more satisfactory than it really is, just because he saw such a welcome contrast to what was in Stalinist Russia?

ABBOT E. SMITH
Acting Chairman
Board of National Estimates

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Comment on George Kennan's memo on Poland

1. We in this office also think that George Kennan's analysis of the Polish situation is excellent. It strikes a nice balance between the oddities of the situation, such as the emancipated conversation of the Polish intelligentsia, and the facts of life, which include the still very disagreeable Communist proclivities of regime leaders. We share Kennan's cautious optimism concerning the long-range future of the Polish economy. We agree that it would be foolish to believe that Poland is on the road to real self-emancipation from the Soviet orientation, and even more foolish to talk much of "liberation", or to use tactics which might upset the exceedingly delicate balance of forces operating in and on Poland.

2. One of the best parts of Kennan's remarks is his passage on Germany, and on the question of the Western borders of Poland. We agree with his analysis. I have heard it argued, however, from premises like those of Kennan, that if we could get Poland's present western borders accepted by the Germans we would thereby appreciably ease the Soviet pressure on Poland. This I do not believe. The other forces binding Poland to the Soviet Union are too strong. Indeed, if we showed our hand in such a move it might persuade the Soviets that we were meddling too easily in Polish affairs, and they might undertake some unpleasant retaliation.

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3. In this office, there is some tendency for the old to divide from the young on the question of Germany. On the whole, our young men think that the Germans have shot their bolt, and have now got enough sense to keep the peace. The old men of the Board still tend to distrust the Germans, and to harbor misgivings about them, and to suspect that some day they ^{may} cause another disaster. I do not know whether the Board's view represents the wisdom of age or just the survival of prejudice. But we do not blame the Poles for being alarmed by the Germans.

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5. Our estimate on Poland -- NIE 12.6-58: The Outlook in Poland -- is currently being prepared and is scheduled for IAC consideration on 9 September.

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13 August

TO : A. E. Smith

FROM: J. Huizenga

1. I think there are two additional lines of comment on the Kennan memo which you might include:

a. It is probably too early to entertain an optimistic view (his II (2)) of the prospects of the Polish economy. It is true that the peasants have made substantial gains since collectivization was terminated. But the increase in agricultural output and food supplies in the free market has been accompanied by sharp price increases. The wage-price squeeze has evidently tightened for salaried workers, and this is one source of the increased labor indiscipline, alcoholism, black-marketeering, etc. More broadly, it remains to be proved that a socialist economy can be half-free and half-planned. It is possible that the attempt to operate in this way will only accentuate imbalances and ultimately lead to an attempt to reimpose sweeping controls. This in turn would be likely to have important political consequences. I do not say that the outlook is for economic crisis, but only that we ought to reserve judgment.

b. Kennan's memo leaves me with the feeling that he sees in the Polish political situation a greater degree of stability than



is justified. The retreat from the liberties won in October 1956 -- both for individual Poles and for Poland vis-a-vis the USSR -- has continued. This must alienate many who have thus far accepted Gomulka's leadership as the least painful alternative. The church-state conflict has been reopened. The Bloc's anti-revisionist campaign must surely have had the Polish party and regime as a main target. While I do not think the Soviets had it in mind to provoke a showdown crisis, it is likely that they intend to conduct guerilla political warfare against the Poles until an acceptable degree of conformity to Soviet ideology and practice is restored. The point is that important ^{causes} ~~causes~~ of instability continue to be present, and we must continue to regard the Polish scene as subject to unexpected and even violent developments.

2. With respect to your comment in Para. 2: I think you underestimate the favorable effects of a Polish-German border settlement. It is not so much that this would liberate the Poles from Russia all at once. But it would basically modify the power environment in which Polish policy operates, and would give it much greater chance to exercise small options for an independent line, the cumulative effect of which could be important over a period of time. The real futility in discussing the advantages of a Polish-German border settlement lies in the fact that this can come only after an internal German settlement, and this latter seems as remote as ever.

3. Your Para. 3: I do not know whether you would count me here among the young or old. I confess to feeling a little old, but in any case I do not wish to be associated with either the young or old view of Germany as stated here. I have always argued in the Board's discussions of a possible future German threat that considerations of German goodness or badness, sense or foolishness are irrelevant. What matters is that the power position of any future Germany has been wholly transformed, as compared with the world of pre-1939. This is due both to the nature of weapons developments and to the enormous comparative growth of Soviet power, a power which is applied principally, moreover, to defending Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe against all comers. Germany must be thought of as a power on the scale of France or Britain and her capacity for mischief correspondingly reduced. In these terms, it is hard to see how policies of adventurism and menace could ever again present themselves to Germans as a plausible alternative.

P.S.

Further on Kennan: Having listened to him much this last year, I have the feeling that he preserves basically a late-Stalinist image of the Soviet scene, the period of his last and unhappy service there. It does not surprise me that he is impressed and pleased to find in Poland such very considerable variations from his model of the Soviet world.

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